Catherine GRAVET
Faculty of Translation and Interpretation, University of Mons
Mons, Belgium
catherine.gravet@umons.ac.be

Delphine COPPIN
Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, University of Liège
Liège, Belgium
dcoppin@uliege.be

THE DEPICTION OF DOGS IN THE WORKS OF FRANCOPHONE BELGIAN NOVELISTS (SIMENON, MUNO, AND BERTIN)

Recommended citation: Gravet, Catherine and Delphine Coppin. "The Depiction of Dogs in the Works of Francophone Belgian Novelists (Simenon, Muno, and Bertin)". *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 11.2 (2025). DOI: https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2025.20.03.

Abstract: This article explores the representation of dogs in Francophone Belgian fiction by three male novelists – Georges Simenon, Jean Muno, and Charles Bertin – while contrasting their works with those of female contemporaries previously studied by Catherine Gravet (Chien 79-100). Through a close textual analysis of *L'Homme au petit chien* (Simenon), *Le Joker* (Muno), and *Le Voyage d'hiver* (Bertin), we investigate whether these authors adopt the "animal's point of view" (Baratay) and focus on its emotions, understood through the lens of Panksepp's research on animal emotions in the field of affective neuroscience. We suggest that the three novels concentrate on animal emotions: emotions provoked through dogs (Muno), as well as emotions felt and triggered by dogs (Simenon, Bertin). Ultimately, we show Simenon's and Bertin's novels, while still reflecting an anthropomorphising perspective, may be part of a shifting cultural attitude towards animals, highlighting a genuine attempt at acknowledging canine consciousness, subjectivity and affectivity.

Keywords: Francophone Belgian novelists, animal emotions, animal point of view, gender studies, zoopoetics, dogs

Introduction

Since prehistory, animals have changed, our ways of seeing them have changed, and they in turn have changed the humans who observe them (Despret). In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a founding work of zoopoetics (Simon, Bête; Driscoll and Hoffman), Jacques Derrida distinguishes two Western types of discourse regarding the animal: "texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analysed, reflected on the animal, but who have never seen themselves being seen by the animal" and those that have taken into account of the fact that what we call "the animal" can look at us and, "without a word, address" us (13). He came to this conclusion after feeling *embarrassed* being caught, naked, in the gaze of his cat. The emotions felt and caused by (non-)human animals have recently become an object of interest across several disciplines. In his research, Jaak Panksepp (Affective Neuroscience, Affective Consciousness, Basic) shows that mammals, including humans, share seven primary emotional systems – regulating fear, panic / sadness, anger, seeking, lust, care, play – as well as "primary-process emotional feelings", that arise when those emotional systems are activated. According to him, "other mammals do have affective experiences" (Affective Consciousness 31) and they "do have affective feelings functionally similar to our own" (38).

In her article "Le chien chez quelques romancières belges francophones contemporaines" ("The Depiction of Dogs in the Work of Francophone Belgian Novelists"), Catherine Gravet (Chien) attempts to identify the perspective of women novelists on dogs in Francophone Belgian literature. She does so notably by analysing: *Le Chien* (1964) written by Eugénie De Keyser (1918-2012), *Le Trajet* (1976) by Marie-Louise Haumont (1919-2012) and *La Maison dont le chien est fou* (1997) by Françoise Mallet-Joris (1930-2016). She concludes that female novelists rarely consider the animal point of view, just as Baratay (Point de vue, Biographies) points out in his essay. Indeed, female novelists seem to refuse to "leave the field of anthropocentrism"[1] and find it difficult to "put into words «subjectivities» (...) or

[1] "Quitter le terrain de l'anthropocentrisme". In this article, when quoting from non-English, untranslated sources, the English translations (provided by Delphine Coppin) are placed in the text with a footnote containing the original excerpt in French.

animal consciousness, [to] reproduce non-human languages"[2] (Simon, Études). Could that be the case for male novelists, too? Authored roughly in the same period, do the following three novels attempt to adopt the dogs' perspective: Georges Simenon's *L'Homme au petit chien* (1964), Jean Muno's *Le Joker* (1988), and Charles Bertin's *Le Voyage d'hiver* (1989)? What emotions do dogs experience in the novels? And what emotions do they arouse in the human characters?

Simenon

The Man with the Little Dog (*L'Homme au petit chien*) (1964) is Simenon's 101st "*romans durs*".[3] This novel is written in the first person, in the form of a diary. Since his release from prison, Félix Allard, the protagonist, has been haunted by thoughts of suicide, all the more so because he has only two years left to live. In a notebook, he feels the need to take stock of his life, beginning with the present – the routine life with his dog Bib, a poodle (Man 14), to whom he speaks regularly and who "answers in his own way" (Man 6). In the morning, they have "a little chat" (Man 6). When Bib "has had enough of [their] early-morning effusions, he tugs at the sheet to uncover [Allard] and then springs down on to the floor" (Man 6). Bib goes out while Allard prepares coffee. The latter does not need to:

> go as far as the window to know that Bib, after sniffing at everything there was to sniff at, would come solemnly back to the house and push open the door with his head. After which, according to a habit formed right at the beginning, he would close it in the same way before coming up the stairs. (Man 9-10)

Not only does Bib open and close the door, but he also fetches his bag when Allard asks him to (Man 16). Allard likes to pretend that Bib understands whatever he says and answers with his tail, his ears or his eyes. "The word *walk* is one that he knows well, and he display[s] his joy by scampering about excitedly" (Man 10). When Allard starts to write, Bib is "surprised" (Man 13) and tries to figure out what has changed in his master's behaviour. When Bib feels lonely or abandoned, he lies down on his back and plays dead (Man 13). Bib can also be "satisfied" (Man 15), "bewildered" (Man 22), "uneasy" (Man 117), he can look at Allard questioningly (Man 24), stare at him "with

[2] "mettre en mots des «subjectivités» […] ou des consciences animales, [à] restituer des langages […] non-humains".
[3] A "*roman dur*" is a term coined by Georges Simenon to differentiate his psychological, and often darker novels from his more famous detective stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

surprise, almost with disapproval" (Man 26), "gaze at [him] reproachfully" (Man 148). Allard and Bib regularly try to guess each other's thoughts (Man 39): "At first he thought I was going to the toilet. When he saw me move towards the window he hesitated, as I used to hesitate with my parents, torn between a selfish desire to relapse into sleep and his duty – I suppose he considers it a duty – to follow me" (Man 45). Allard, for his part, draws a comparison between himself and his dog: "In fact, we're the same age, he and I. His back is growing stiffer, his body thicker, but he still keeps on playing with his little ball and doing his tricks" (Man 44). He also feels empathy for his dog:

> Poor old Bib! Forgive me. After twice hiding your ball half-heartedly, without bothering to look for a difficult place, I pretended not to understand that you still wanted to play. You did not insist, but instead of going to sleep on the bed you subsided under the table at my feet. I feel that you are uneasy about all these changes in our habits. Are you wondering, as men do, what the future has in store for you? (Man 117)

He does not want to "disappoint" Bib, he "needs" him (Man 138). Bib allows his "owner" to question, step by step, the link between love, jealousy and possessiveness: "You're *my* dog. Are you conscious of belonging to me (…)? (…) Why, it has suddenly struck me: (…) You had an earlier master, who took pains to teach you [the tricks you perform], or found pleasure in doing so. It never occurred to me to be jealous of him" (Man 117-8). When he finally decides not to take his own life, he is hit, a few weeks later, by a bus and killed instantly. "The dog, which by a miracle escaped uninjured, has been taken to the strays' home" (Man 160).

The Man with the Little Dog is the only Simenon novel in which a dog is a fully-fledged character endowed with agency. However, dogs do appear in some of his other novels. In *The Yellow Dog*[4] (*Le Chien jaune*) (1931), which is part of the "Maigret" series, Chief Inspector Maigret is sent to investigate the perpetrator of a crime. Day after day, fear gradually spreads through the town, and the inhabitants, seeing the dog as the source of their misfortunes, turn against him in a street so violently that "the animal can barely drag himself along (…) He's howling…" (Yellow 37). On Maigret's arrival, two youngsters are still "pelting the dog with stones"

[4] Simenon's first dog was a "dogue d'Ulm" (Assouline 136), which happens to be the breed of his famous yellow dog.

(Yellow 38). When the inspector leans down to stroke the dog's head, the animal gives him a look that is more "puzzled than grateful" (Yellow 39):

> The dog was filthy, his dense coat matted with blood. His belly was muddy, his nose dry and burning. Now that someone was showing kindness, he took heart and stopped trying to creep along the ground through the dozens of large stones that lay around him. (…) The yellow dog panted hard, an occasional spasm stiffening his four legs (Yellow 39).

By helping the dog, Maigret is the only character showing respect and compassion[5] for the animal, because he *cares*, "care" being one of Panksepp's positive emotional systems. In *The Krull House* (*Chez Krull*) (1939), Liesbeth Krull, while being sexually assaulted by her cousin, focuses on the sound of "a dog pulling on a chain in a yard" (Krull 81). Both of them experience "fear", Panksepp's first negative emotional system: "FEAR activity is triggered in situations of danger and results in a genetically programmed fight, flight, or freezing reaction" (Montag and Davis 18). They share the same emotion, but not the same reaction: while Liesbeth freezes, the dog tries to flee, reflecting the female character's own inability to escape or act.

In *Act of Passion* (*Lettre à mon juge*) (1947), the narrator, Charles Alavoine, who like dogs, is a being subject to his instincts. Several times, the idea of a dog appears in the text, often linked to raw, almost bestial desire[6]. The narrator also compares his mistress to a restless little dog in constant need of attention:

> I love big dogs that are strong and conscious, quietly conscious, of their strength. I have a horror of those little dogs that are never still, that run around after their own tails and insist on attention all the time. Well, that evening she made me think of one of those little dogs. (Simenon, Act 94)

[5] According to Stevens and Woodruff, "emotional empathy" can be defined as the fact of inferring "the internal states of others by projecting ourselves into their states and then reading the other's internal experiences from our own". Compassion, on the other hand, is "composed of three components: (1) (brief) affective empathy, (2) a cognitive labeling of the experience as «sadness», and so on, and (3) a desire to help (…). The third component of compassion which differentiates it from empathy is the desire to alleviate the suffering of the other" (5-6).

[6] At least in the French version, as the sentence has been removed from the English translation: "Je n'ai jamais vu une femme manier un bâton de rouge sans penser malgré moi au sexe d'un chien en chaleur" (Simenon, Lettre 82). "I have never seen a woman handle a red lipstick without thinking, in spite of myself, of the sex of a dog in heat" (My translation).

In *In Case of Emergency* (*En cas de Malheur*) (1956), Lucien Gabillot also compares his mistress to a dog. He sees her as the personification of:

> the female, with her weaknesses, her cowardice, and also with her instinct to cling to the male and make herself his slave. (…) If tomorrow I abandon her, she will turn back, on the streets, into a little bitch wandering about in search of a master (…) She tells lies. She's deceitful. She puts on acts. She makes up stories to worry me and, now that she's sure of her daily bread, she wallows in laziness (…) At the sight of a passing male she's in heat and, in the street, she stares at men's trousers, at one definite place, as intensely as men stare at the bottoms of women walking past. More than once it's taken no more to excite her than a picture of underpants or swimming-trunks in a magazine advertisement. (Simenon, Case 99-100)

In this passage, the narrator portrays the woman through an (negative) animalising lens that "reduces" her to instinct and dependence. By comparing her to "a little bitch wandering about in search of a master" (Case 99), he denies her individuality and represents her instead as a creature driven by weakness, deceit, and sexual appetite. Such description reflects neither the inner reality of the woman nor that of the female dog, but rather Gabillot's own projections: his gaze transforms her into an object of suspicion and desire, defined solely by her supposed need for male authority. The dog imagery, therefore, is less a portrait of the woman than an expression of Gabillot's own desires to dominate and control. This comparison woman / female can also be found in the original version of *The Patient* (*Les Anneaux de Bicêtre*) (1963), when the main character compares two nurses: "More female than Mlle Blanche, [Joséfa] needs males"[7]. In *The Hand* (*La Main*) (1968), Donald Dodd compares himself to a dog, which embodies the main character's sexual attraction to Mona, the wife of his missing friend: "What I remember best was the presence of a female in the house. You would have thought that I could smell her, like a dog, that I went looking for her as soon as she left my sight, that I prowled around her, awaiting an occasion to touch her" (Simenon, Hand 53).

Across Simenon's oeuvre, dogs are endowed with a varied range of emotions and feelings. The yellow dog feels pain and puzzlement, while Bib experiences joy, surprise, loneliness, abandon, satisfaction, bewilderment, uneasiness, disapproval

[7] My translation. "Plus femelle que Mlle Blanche, elle a besoin de mâles" (Simenon, Anneaux 101). In the English translation, the reference to the dog has been omitted and the declaration is nuanced: "She was more highly sexed than Mlle Blanche, and she must need men" (Simenon, Patient 73).

and reproach. In turn, Maigret and Allard feel deep empathy, even compassion, towards them, treat them with respect and see them as their equals. In Simenon's other novels (from 1939 to 1968), dogs only serve as metaphor or comparison element, clearly reflecting an anthropomorphising perspective and an often devaluating animalisation, especially when comparing women to female dogs, namely as weak, cowardly, horny, dominated, dishonest, deceitful, misleading, and lazy.

Muno

Although no dog appears in the title of Jean Muno's novel (pseudonym of Robert Burniaux), it does feature on the cover of the Espace Nord reedition. The bichon given by Jasmine to her mother, Mrs. Face, turns out to be a "joker" for her son. Indeed, in *Le Joker* (*The Joker*), Kiki, a "*chien de cocotte*" (dog belonging to a woman of loose morals, or a sex worker), brings unexpected success to Alphonse Face, a timid, submissive young man with no personality. Thanks to this dog, his sister Jasmine's dog, and to an astonishing gift for mimicry (probably his only talent), Alphonse becomes the enlightened, admired manager of an antique store.

Although he shows no will of its own, Kiki charms everyone, facilitates countless encounters, and transforms his master's life, leading Alphonse to tell himself that: "since you've been walking Jasmine's bichon, the street has changed. It's lost its mask of indifference. People see you, recognize you; you exist for them" (Joker 13)[8]; "you can't believe you exist" (Joker 32)[9]. The man without qualities discovers a gift – the same as Kiki's – "the wonderful gift of belonging to everyone, of existing through others" (Joker 36)[10]. Thus, Alphonse "slowly awakens from a long barbarity" (Joker 37)[11]. This is "the Kiki effect" (Joker 30)[12]. For example, a female client relaxes while caressing the bichon, which awakens in this middle-aged woman "a certain maternal (…) slowness" (Joker 30)[13]. Remarks flow, to Alphonse's advantage: "judging by his dog, he must be a charming man" (Joker 31)[14].

When Kiki goes missing, Alphonse dimly realizes how precious the animal is to him: it represents escape, a fragile hope for something, whatever this may be (Joker

[8] "depuis que tu promènes le bichon de Jasmine, la rue s'est métamorphosée. Elle a perdu son masque d'indifférence. On te voit, on te reconnaît ; tu existes pour les gens".
[9] "tu n'en reviens pas d'exister".
[10] "le don merveilleux d'appartenir à chacun, d'exister par les autres".
[11] "s'éveille doucement d'une longue barbarie".
[12] "l'effet-Kiki".
[13] "une certaine lenteur […] maternelle".
[14] "si j'en juge par son chien, ce doit être un homme charmant".

43-44). Once found, Kiki is rediscovered by the reader as well, seen as an art object through the eye of a potential aesthete: "Kiki stretches, yawns. His tongue, like a pistil, in his little pink mouth… He lies on his side. His white fur on the golden velvet – this is the only thing truly precious to the eye…" (Joker 45)[15]. Kiki and Alphonse, "on the autumn-coloured sofa, [are] like two little lamps trying to warm one another" (Joker 51)[16].

This little dog is "further proof of your aspirations toward Beauty" (56)[17], or so the new Alphonse wants to believe. Attribute or sceptre, a true talisman, the bichon confirms the intuition of Amélie, the young woman Alphonse has fallen in love with; she had seen in him "a poet's gaze", which illustrates Shelley's quote stating that the poets are a race of chameleons (61)[18]. *Le Joker* could thus be read as a disguised autobiography. Yet the larval and asthenic hero has no father (and that is precisely his problem), while Muno felt crushed by his own – Constant Burniaux, a prolific writer. Whether through absence or stifling presence, the outcome is the same: the father prevents growth. Another autobiographical clue: in *Rages et ratures. Pages inédites du Journal* (*Rages and Crossings-out. Unpublished Pages from the Journal*), two photographs show Muno with a Brussels griffon, which could prove the author's attachment to the animal (Muno, Rages 27).

Daniel Laroche, in his *Lecture*, points out the narratological function of the animal: "At once intruder, toy, and fabulous creature, it is above all the trigger of a new period" (168)[19], an observation that applies to young Alphonse's initiations, too; this is a period during which, through misunderstandings and blunders, the vain-in-his-own-way hero contents himself with "being what others want him to be" (169)[20] in the hope of succeeding. His mimicry – though not Machiavellian (170) – allows others to "invent" for him a new personality, one closer to the naïve one generally attributed to a dog.

But everything is illusion, appearance and theatre: the poo on the carpet, first, then the alopecia, the mange or the eczema that marks the "snow bichon" (Muno,

[15] "Kiki s'étire, bâille. Sa langue, tel un pistil, dans sa petite gueule rose… Il s'allonge sur le flanc. Sa fourrure blanche sur le velours doré, c'est ici la seule chose précieuse à l'œil…".
[16] "dans le divan couleur d'automne [sont] comme deux petites lampes qui tentent de se réchauffer l'une l'autre".
[17] "une preuve supplémentaire de tes aspirations vers le Beau".
[18] "les poètes sont une race de caméléons".
[19] "À la fois intrus, joujou et animal fabuleux, celui-ci est surtout le déclencheur d'une période nouvelle".
[20] "d'être ce que les autres veulent qu'il soit".

Joker 16), the sad coat that disfigures the mascot, stripping Alphonse of his juggling tricks. Failures follow in succession. Only the death of the bichon (the ultimate *coup de théâtre*) frees Alphonse, now a man without a dog, from the obligation to play a role. It brings him back to what matters: his dream of being with Amélie, the young woman he loves, a dream he finally fulfils, in full joy. Freed from parental, social, and canine constraints, the lovers can at last enter real life, with no need for a joker. As Laroche writes, seeing *Le Joker* as a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education: "The illness of the totemic animal, then its disappearance, illustrate the hero's necessary downfall, which ultimately allows him to access another existence" (Lecture 175)[21].

Muno, hardly ever, if at all, considers the "animal's point of view" and the dog's emotions. For naturalist writers, "to speak of animals (…) would allow one to speak with greater force of man, his society, his oppression, and his suffering, while still speaking of the animal itself, its own oppression, and its own suffering" (Aron and Sadoun-Édouard 5-6)[22]. Aron and Sadoun-Édouard stress the "political scope of the animal allegory": novelists "take advantage" of dogs to "call into question society and its injustices" (5-6)[23] – in Alphonse Face's case, the injustice of having no father. And often, dogs convey the idea of freedom, sometimes counterbalanced by its opposites – slavery or stability – without these notions acquiring political weight. In the nineteenth century, naturalists associated "the «*toutou*» with the prostitute to criticize a hypocritical and cruel society that commodifies bodies and animalises beings" (6-7).[24] A similar pattern appears – though without a political dimension – in Muno's novel, where the dog-object is in some sense only a tool for success, a useful accessory which, as in theatre, allows its master to enter a new world where, perhaps, he may truly live.

Bertin

In the "romance" *Le Voyage d'hiver* (*The Winter Journey*), Sabin Ferrier, the stranger who settles in a small Roussillon village in the late 1960s, aspires to become a writer, and according to the last lines of the story, some twenty years later, it seems

[21] "La maladie de l'animal totémique, puis sa disparition illustrent l'indispensable déchéance du héros, qui lui permettra en fin de compte d'accéder à une autre existence".
[22] "dire l'animal permettrait […] de dire avec plus de force l'homme, sa société, son oppression et sa souffrance sans pour autant cesser de dire l'animal lui-même, sa propre oppression et sa propre souffrance".
[23] "remettre en question la société et ses injustices".
[24] "le «toutou» à la prostituée pour critique[r] une société hypocrite et cruelle qui marchandise les corps et animalise les êtres".

he has succeeded. This success occurs, indirectly, thanks to his dog – or rather his female dog. But the long journey that leads him to the winter of his life is marked by trials in which his dog plays her part.

Madly in love with Aline, Sabin moves with her atop Mount Sédron, in a country house beside a Romanesque chapel, Notre-Dame-de-Vie. But happiness only enters the story through misfortune, and years must pass before the writing process can resume. When Aline dies in a car accident shortly after their wedding, a puppy saves Sabin from suicide. Alternating between the widower's present and memories of happier times, Bertin describes the intimate bond uniting the aging Briard and his master in a subtle counterpoint of woman / dog. Does not Aline shake her head "like a young dog shaking itself" (47)?[25] Every detail converges to show the deep complicity between Sabin and Badine, even in the intertwining of the letters of their names. Man and animal resemble one another in their "long, bristling grey whiskers (…) – Such mimicry is seen in solitude" (58)[26].

The man helps his old dog climb up beside him so that they may contemplate the night together and delay the moment when Sabin, alone in his bed, will be "defenceless against the assault of his memories" (15)[27]. He knows that Badine, too, remembers "panic-stricken rabbits, strangled rats, terrified hens (…), a past full of exasperated scents where the smell of blood mingled with the odours of undergrowth, hay barns, and poultry yards" (16)[28].

Sabin also knows that "the years have passed and the weariness of age has come" (16)[29] for his dog. She will no longer leap toward adventure. Attentive to her needs – a bowl of fresh water, for instance, or the careful preparation of her food when she asks for her breakfast by barking briefly (40) – and to her feelings, he waits until she has eaten before taking his own breakfast. And she never takes her eyes off her master (53), with an attentive gaze (57). While he spares her strength, talks to her, explains that he is entrusting her with the house, and urges her to keep watch (41), Badine listens attentively, understands and gives up the walk grudgingly (41). Sabin recognizes the type of bark she reserves for emergencies when walkers

[25] "comme un jeune chien qui s'ébroue".
[26] "longues moustaches grises hérissées […] – On voit de ces mimétismes dans la solitude".
[27] "livré sans défense à l'assaut de ses souvenirs".
[28] "lapins éperdus, de rats égorgés, de poules affolées […], un passé de senteurs exaspérées où le fumet du sang des victimes se mêle à des odeurs de sous-bois, de granges à foin, de basses-cours".
[29] "les années ont passé et la fatigue de l'âge est venue".

approach the house, or the low, continuous growl when intruders fail to understand they must stop (57). Their dialogue extends to reverie:

> He has just noticed a pink cloud in the shape of a horse's head, drifting eastward toward the sea, and he calls Badine's attention to this pleasant cavalcade of this cloud-mount playing leapfrog with the hills. He expects she will find some reason to smile at the sight – it is undeniable that she sometimes has glimmers in her gaze, if not, rises of chops, that express good humour (87)[30].

When lightning strikes and Badine whines in terror, Ferrier takes her into his bed and soothes her tenderly (82). The acknowledgement of the dog's physical state is clear: "Her legs feel heavy and her breath is a little short" (83)[31], the heat is overwhelming, but she cannot resist her favourite walk. How could she resist the temptation when she sees her master grab his rucksack and hears him "say the word *village* or any other term evoking delights such as *butcher*, *rib steak*, *sirloin*, or even *Escaladieu* [the butcher's name]" (83)[32]. Through the scrubland, the dog checks that her master stays on the path; she feels entrusted with an important mission and rejoices over a locust caught mid-flight – and above all over the gift awaiting her at the butcher's (84).

On their last descent into town, the dog "is visibly struggling to keep up with her Companion's pace" (83)[33]. Sabin slows down, encouraging her "as one comforts a sick child" (83)[34]: "Courage, my old girl, look ahead, the oak grove is there, so close. Just one last effort and we'll be there" (83)[35]. He even pretends to be tired himself, refrains from carrying her to avoid humiliating her, and instead "decides to wait as long as necessary; to pass the time without alarming his companion with excessive solicitude, he calmly undertakes an inventory of his rucksack" (88)[36]. Worry and

[30] "Il vient d'apercevoir un nuage rose à tête de cheval qui dérive lentement vers l'est en direction de la mer, et il appelle l'attention de Badine sur la plaisante cavalcade de cette monture de nuées qui joue à saute-mouton avec les collines. Il escompte qu'elle voudra bien trouver matière à sourire dans ce tableau – il est indiscutable qu'elle a parfois de ces lueurs dans le regard, sinon de ces retroussées de babines, qui expriment la bonne humeur".
[31] "Elle se sent les pattes lourdes et le souffle un peu court".
[32] "prononcer le mot village ou tout autre terme évocateur de délices comme boucherie, entrecôte, aloyau et même Escaladieu".
[33] "a visiblement peine à suivre l'allure imposée par son Compagnon".
[34] "l'encourage comme on réconforte un enfant malade".
[35] "Courage ma vieille, regarde devant toi, le bois de chêne est là, tout près. Un dernier effort et nous y sommes".
[36] "il prend alors le parti de patienter le temps qu'il faudra et pour user l'heure qui passe, sans alarmer sa compagne par un excès de sollicitude, il entreprend posément l'inventaire de son sac à dos".

anguish grip him (88), he knows that his dog is the only being whose death would still cause him deep grief (86), and he realizes, stricken, that "Badine will not remain his life's companion much longer" (89)[37].

After the terribly arduous climb back to the house, Ferrier tends to her, gives her lukewarm water, bathes her at length, wraps her in a towel, settles her in her basket, and watches over her restless sleep, wondering "what dreams troubled her sleep: brief convulsive shudders shook her from time to time, and without opening her eyes, she would be seized by hiccups that shook her whole body" (89)[38].

After this first warning, Sabin, entirely devoted, spares Badine and attempts to distract her, even if the rubber bone he offers seems childish to her; she accepts it only "so as not to offend her companion" (116)[39]. He lights a fire for her because he knows she will enjoy it (116). For Badine, who expresses herself in a particularly poetic and vivid manner, the satisfaction comes from the realization that her "Master still holds power over nature. It is a pleasure of the finest quality to see, born from the joining of a few seemingly soulless logs drawn from the woodpile, a profusion of ever-renewed narrative flowers" (117)[40]. "How could one not faint with delight"[41] before the "cascades of happy surprises in colours, sounds, and scents?"[42]. The "astonishing well-being (…), the caress of warmth" (117)[43] fill their bodies and lead them to sleep.

> [The] *days of fire* (…) count few rivals in the paradise of days, (…) a boon for tenderness. (…) the Master is there, near you (…) Your muzzle rests at His chair's foot. (…) He scratches the top of your head, a circular motion of his rake-like fingers, generating the greatest pleasure the soul can know in this world. (…) Badine half-opens an eye, awaiting the next caress. Bliss of love, instants of ineffable delight… (117)[44]

[37] "Badine ne sera plus longtemps la compagne de sa vie".
[38] "quels rêves troublaient son sommeil : de brefs tremblements convulsifs l'agitaient de temps à autre et il lui arrivait d'être secouée, sans qu'elle ouvrît les yeux, par des hoquets qui faisaient tressaillir tout son corps".
[39] "pour ne pas désobliger son compagnon".
[40] "Maître a conservé tous ses pouvoirs sur la nature. C'est un plaisir d'une qualité très fine que de voir naître soudain, de la réunion de quelques rondins apparemment sans âme qu'il va puiser dans la réserve à bois, une foison de fleurs narratives toujours renouvelées".
[41] "Comment ne pas défaillir d'aise".
[42] "cascades d'heureuses surprises sur la gamme des couleurs, des sons et des parfums".
[43] "bien-être stupéfiant […], la caresse de la chaleur".
[44] "[Les] *jours à feu* […] compte[nt] peu de rivaux dans le paradis des journées, […] une aubaine pour la tendresse. […] le Maître est là, près de vous […]. On a le museau collé au pied de Son fauteuil. […] Il vous gratte le sommet du crâne, d'un mouvement tournant des doigts en râteau, générateur du plus de plaisir que l'âme puisse connaître en ce monde. […] Badine entrouvre un œil dans l'attente de la caresse prochaine. Bonheur de l'amour, instants d'ineffables délices…".

Before her agony, despite her exhaustion, Badine was "at the height of happiness" (142)[45] because her Master "treated her as a responsible adult" (142)[46]. He understood "that she had a rational mind and a sense of responsibility" (142)[47]. She was his "collaborator" in gardening tasks:

> Together they cleared the hackberry grove, collected deadwood (…), stacked bundles and logs (…) She had done her share of hauling alongside the wheelbarrow, making countless trips with a branch in her mouth between the woods and the house. (…) Badine concluded that he was delighted with the work accomplished, and she was moved to the depths of her heart. (142)[48]

Alas, the night following this fine day will be her last: "a strange cry, half-bark, half-whimper (…) part groan of pain, part call for help" (143)[49] awakens Sabin, who kneels by her side, whispering in her ear "that litany of tender little words which is the language of their intimacy" (144)[50]. The whimpers, the dog's "eyes full of panic and perplexity" (144)[51], terrify him. Coronary thrombosis, heart failure, and the onset of cancer overcome her desire to live and to please her master; the loving care Sabin lavishes on her, never leaving her side, cannot save her. The next morning, Badine's eyes remain open, "but they had lost that gaze that could at will shine with all the trust and all the love in the world" (147)[52]. Sabin continues to encourage her, speaks to her, closes her eyes, carefully washes her paws, nails, and hindquarters, then takes his spade and a crate to bury her in the grove beside the chapel (147). Aline too lies buried at the chapel's foot (171).

Sabin had understood: "Adopting Badine was, in his eyes, the only event that had significantly influenced the course of his life over the past fifteen years" (118)[53].

---

[45] "au comble du bonheur".
[46] "l'a traitée en adulte responsable".
[47] "qu'elle avait l'esprit raisonnable et le sens des responsabilités".
[48] "Ils ont essarté ensemble tout le bosquet de micocouliers, collecté le bois mort […], rangé fagots et bûches […] Elle avait assumé sa part de tâches de transport aux côtés de la brouette et fait maintes fois l'aller-retour, un rameau dans la gueule, entre le bois et la maison. […] Badine en avait conclu qu'il était enchanté de l'œuvre accomplie et elle en avait été touchée jusqu'au fond du cœur".
[49] "un cri étrange, mi-aboi, mi-gémissement […] qui tient à la fois du grognement de douleur et de l'appel à l'aide".
[50] "ce chapelet de petits mots tendres qui est le langage de leur intimité".
[51] "plein de panique et de perplexité".
[52] "mais ils ont perdu ce regard qui les illuminait à volonté de toute la confiance et de tout l'amour du monde".
[53] "l'adoption de Badine constitue à ses yeux l'unique péripétie qui ait influencé de manière sensible le cours de sa vie au cours des quinze dernières années".

He remembers the first look the puppy gave him when placed in his arms at the start of his widowhood, "a look that, in human language, would have had the value of a vow of love" (173)[54]. The memory of this "scene of meeting an animal" (Schoentjes, Regards) plunges him into desolation. Badine's death makes him relive Aline's, whose ghost appears to him. Alone a second time, he lives in shock (172), dwelling on the idea that the dog "forged a connection beyond death between the two beings he had loved" (173)[55]. But more unexpectedly, the dog's death drives him to reopen his writing desk; solitude and sorrow return Sabin to his writer's vocation, and the story he begins on the final page (191) is the very one the reader has just finished.

Even more than Bib, Badine experiences every human emotion and feeling: dignity (15), excitement (16), gratitude (40), optimism (she wakes each morning convinced that she is beginning a new life, 40), alacrity (manifest in her wagging, nibbling, leaping, 40), "innocent dismay"[56] when so breathless she can only lie down (40), anger (57), terror and panic (82), the joy of catching a locust, the pleasure of bones received (87), the urge to smile (87), distress and humiliation (88), tenderness and love (117), even jealousy when her master tends to his hens (174). Her sense of responsibility and of well-done collaborative work (142), her agony, her death, her burial (142-148), make this dog into a character more moving than Aline, whose sudden accident barely stirred readers. Moreover, negative emotions are rare, making Badine all the more humanised and increasing her degree of "agreeableness", unlike Simenon's portrayal of female dogs. As for Sabin, he is empathetic, understanding, encouraging, comforting, attentive, worried and anguished towards her.

Conclusion

Literature increasingly acknowledges the animal's perspective and subjectivity, a movement notably pioneered, amongst numerous others, by Colette with *Dialogues de bêtes* (1904) and Virginia Woolf with *Flush* (1933). At the end of the twentieth century, customs changed, probably partly due to the Australian Peter Singer's essay *Animal Liberation* (1975), the ethical work that has contributed the most to the recognition of animal rights, notably in literature. Schoentjes (Littérature) also places the interest of Francophone writers in "green literature" during the same period (Littérature 17); he includes in his analysis the animal cause – most often within a

[54] "un regard qui, en langage humain, aurait eu la valeur d'un serment d'amour".
[55] "établit une connivence par-dessus la mort entre les deux êtres qu'il a aimés".
[56] "désarroi candide".

rural setting (Littérature 105), and the expression of a strong existential relationship with animals (Littérature 106), while noting that this theme is much more present among female novelists (Littérature 108).

Across the works of Simenon, Muno and Bertin, dogs emerge as a complex literary figure, endowed with emotions, except for *Le Joker*. Muno's novel focuses more on the emotions experienced by the human character thanks to and through the dog, which is not an autonomous being, but a theatrical prop. In *L'Homme au petit chien*, Bib is constructed as a literary character through the subjective gaze of his master. The emotions and feelings attributed to him – surprise, reproach, satisfaction – can be considered as anthropomorphic projections that primarily serve the narrative and the exploration of human psychology. Yet, beyond this projection, the text reveals traces of animal experience: concrete gestures (pulling the sheet, opening and closing the door), bodily habits (sniffing, playing with the ball, feigning death), and reactions to words or behavioural changes. These elements allow for the reconstruction of a plausible animal experience, even though it remains filtered through human discourse. The relationship between Allard and Bib is dialogical: they both attempt to guess the other's thoughts, thereby blurring the boundary between representation and subjectivity. Literature thus becomes a space where the animal is both a mirror of the human and a narrative actor endowed with its own presence. In *Le Voyage d'hiver*, by contrast, Badine is constructed as a fully-fledged character with her own narrative trajectory. Her gestures, habits, and reactions are described with precision, granting her a distinct subjectivity, even though these moments also remain inseparable from Sabin's interpretive gaze. Although strongly anthropomorphized – endowed with dignity, responsibility, gratitude, jealousy, even a capacity for poetic reverie – Badine actively participates in the story. Through her, Bertin explores a profound reciprocity between human and animal, and displays not only a keen knowledge of canine habits, but above all an exacerbated empathy, a total communion with the animal, and an extreme compassion for its suffering. The novel could suggest that the author has "observed, analysed, reflected on the animal" (Derrida 13). Paradoxically, in an interview published on January 6th 1990, Bertin admitted: "I don't have a dog, which I sometimes regret" (Livres). He added that

Badine was an important character[57] and that his novel was autobiographical, even though he bore no resemblance to Sabin (Livres).

In sum, these two canine literary figures could exemplify, in different ways, what Baratay calls the "animal point of view" in the sense that they attempt to grasp animal subjectivity, oscillating between human projection and the recognition of observable behaviours (Point de vue). Although these two novels rely on pronounced anthropomorphism, they nonetheless offer several positive insights into the literary treatment of dogs by foregrounding their emotional, relational, and behavioural significance. Both novels portray dogs as vital companions whose presence provides comfort, stability and purpose to protagonists confronting grief, loneliness, or existential despair, thereby underscoring the affective depth of human-animal bonds. At the same time, the texts make a sustained effort to attribute subjectivity to the animals, presenting them as individuated beings endowed with preferences, habits, and distinctive modes of communication, which grants them narrative agency rather than relegating them to symbolic roles. The relationships depicted are markedly reciprocal: the humans attend to the dogs' needs, rhythms, and signals, while the animals shape the protagonists' daily routines, emotional states, and even life trajectories. They also tend to "feel into" (empathy) and "feel with" (compassion) the experiences of dogs (Stevens and Woodruff 5-6). Moreover, both works carefully evoke the dogs' sensory and embodied experiences – fatigue, heat, pleasure, anticipation – in ways that acknowledge their corporeal existence. Finally, by attributing qualities such as responsibility, loyalty, attentiveness, and moral sensitivity, the novels elevate the dogs to ethically resonant presences whose influence decisively transforms the lives of their human companions. Collectively, these elements still reveal a constructive literary impulse to recognise dogs as relational, conscious, and sentient beings.

Works Cited

Assouline, Pierre. *Simenon, biographie*. Julliard, 1992.

Baratay, Éric. *Le Point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire*. Seuil, 2012.

———. *Biographies animales. Des vies retrouvées*. Seuil, 2017.

Bertin, Charles. *Le Voyage d'hiver*. L'Âge d'homme, 1989.

[57] Anne-Rosine Delbart's afterword to the reissue by Espace Nord in 2009 does not focus on the animal.

Colette. *Dialogues de bêtes*. Mercure de France, 1904.

Delbart, Anne-Rosine. "Afterword". *Le Voyage d'hiver* by Charles Bertin, Espace Nord, 2009.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Transl. David Wills. Fordham University Press, 2008.

Despret, Vinciane. *Bêtes et Hommes*. Gallimard, 2007.

Driscoll, Kári, and Hoffmann, Eva. "Introduction: What Is Zoopoetics?". *What Is Zoopoetics? Texts, Bodies, Entanglement*, edited by Kári Driscoll et Eva Hoffmann, Palgrave, 2017, pp. 1-13.

Gravet, Catherine. "Le chien chez quelques romancières belges francophones contemporaines". *Textyles*, no. 67, 2024, pp. 79-100, https://doi.org/10.4000/12k5s. Accessed 20 November 2025.

Laroche, Daniel. "Lecture". *Le Joker* by Jean Muno. Labor, 1988.

———. "Livres Parcours – Charles Bertin". RTBF Auvio. January 6, 1990. Video, 13 : 00. https://auvio.rtbf.be/media/archives-sonuma-litterature-livres-parcours-2661728. Accessed 20 November 2025.

Montag, Christian, and Kenneth Davis. *Animal Emotions. How They Drive Human Behavior*. Brainstorm Books, 2020.

Muno, Jean. *Le Joker*. Louis Musin, 1971.

———. *Rages et ratures. Pages inédites du Journal*. Les éperonniers, 1998.

Panksepp, Jaak. *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

———. "Affective Consciousness: Core Emotional Feelings in Animals and Humans". *Consciousness and Cognition*, 14/1, 2005, pp. 30-80.

———. "The Basic Emotional Circuits of Mammalian Brains: Do Animals Have Affective Lives?". *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 35/9, 2011, pp. 1791-1804.

Schoentjes, Pierre. *Littérature et écologie. Le Mur des abeilles*. Éditions Corti, 2020.

———. *Nos regards se sont croisés. La scène de la rencontre avec un animal*. Le Mot et le Reste, 2022.

Simenon, Georges. *In Case of Emergency*. Transl. Helen Sebba. Penguin, 1965.

———. *The Man with the Little Dog*. Transl. Jean Stewart. Hamish Hamilton, 1965.

———. *The Patient*. Transl. Jean Stewart. Penguin, 1968.

———. *Lettre à mon juge*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1997.

———. *Act of Passion*. Transl. Louise Varèse, New York Review of Books, 2011.

———. *Chez Krull*. Folio Policier, 2012.

———. *The Hand*. Transl. Linda Coverdale. Penguin Classics, 2016.

———. *The Krull House*. Transl. Howard Curtis. Penguin Classics, 2018.

———. *Les Anneaux de Bicêtre*. Le Livre de Poche, 2022.

———. *The Yellow Dog*. Transl. Linda Asher. Penguin Modern Classics, 2025.

Simon, Anne. *Une bête entre les lignes. Essai de zoopoétique*. Wildproject, 2021.

———. "Les études littéraires françaises et la question de l'animalité (XX^{e}-XXI^{e} siècles) : bilan et perspectives en zoopoétique", https://epistemocritique.org/les-etudes-litteraires-francaises-et-la-question-de-lanimalite-xxe-xxie-siecles-bilan-et-perspectives-en-zoopoetique/. Accessed 8 August 2024.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. Random House, 1975.

Stevens, Larry, and Woodruff, Chad C. *The Neuroscience of Empathy, Compassion, and Self-Compassion*. Academic Press, 2018.

Woolf, Virginia. *Flush: A biography*. Hogarth Press, 1933.

Translated from French by Delphine Coppin, revised by Dr. Diana Mistreanu and Prof. Lorely French.